



Green home for the holidays

HOME IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS usually wane during the winter holiday season, for obvious reasons of sanity and finances. As our energies turn to gift giving and events, there are unintended consequences: our energy bills increase, and the amount of waste we produce does too. In fact, Americans throw out 25% more trash during the holiday season. But there are ways to counter these trends. Here are a few ideas:

Decorating for the holidays can consume money and our natural resources. When dressing up your home, look for local, seasonal natural materials (berry-laden twigs, winter foliage etc) that can be composted at the end of the season. Living trees, homemade or locally crafted decorations from recycled content or salvaged materials, and heirloom decorations are also a great way to show holiday spirit while respecting our natural resource base.

Holiday lighting is festive, but can also be a drain on the pocketbook. According to Seattle City Light, conventional holiday lighting can add up to \$50 to your November and December household power bill. Save energy by purchasing long-lasting, low-energy LED (light emitting diode) holiday lights. LED lighting uses approximately one percent of the energy used by standard, old-fashioned large holiday lights, and ten percent of the energy used by mini-lights. They also last substantially longer than conventional holiday lights, and virtually eliminate the risk of fire hazard. For more on LED holiday lights and winter energy savings tips, contact Seattle City Light's Conservation Help Line at 206/684-3800.

Candles should be used judiciously throughout the year. While they provide ambiance, candles can compromise indoor air quality and present a fire hazard. Look for all-cotton wicks and candles made from beeswax or soy. Be especially careful to avoid candles with metal in the wick; these can contain lead that is emitted when the candle is burned. You'll have to look carefully to determine if a wick contains metal—it's not listed on the label.

**LED holiday lighting uses
99% less energy than
its predecessors.**

Gifts are another ubiquitous element of the holiday season. Find gifts that show you care about the recipient and the environment. Books on green and enduring design can help those on your list with upcoming home improvement projects. (Some good examples include *Patterns of Home* by Max Jacobsen, *Building With Vision* by Dan Imhoff, *No-Regrets Remodeling* by Home Energy Magazine, *Green Remodeling* by David Johnston, and *Good Green Homes* by Jennifer Roberts.)

More generally, www.treehugger.com (featured in last month's issue) and similar websites feature novel green products of all types.

Gift certificates for green building materials and retailers could also fit the bill, if you're uncertain about what your recipient needs for an upcoming project. A couple hours worth of time from a green building consultant, such as a home energy specialist or healthy home expert, can help someone in the early stages of their project identify priorities and generate ideas. Others can provide a comprehensive audit of the current home and recommend actions to increase environmental and health performance. Search the Northwest Ecobuilding Guild's *Green Pages* directory

www.ecobuilding.org for specialists, and call to see if they offer home audit services.

Give experiences, instead of stuff. Remodeling can be a major stressor in life! Consider giving a certificate for a massage, personal chef service, bed and breakfast stay or other indulgence to take the edge off a home improvement project. King County's Waste Free Holidays program puts such experience-based gifts at your fingertips, at savings of fifteen percent or more. See www.metrokc.gov for details. Or, call your favorite purveyor of experiences to see if they offer gift cards; many do. With careful planning, you can create a waste free holiday of your own!

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